DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 710 TM 034 874

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TITLE A Case Study on the Use of Portfolios in Principal Evaluation.

PUB DATE 2003-04-00

NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Administrator Evaluation; Case Studies; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; Phenomenology; *Portfolio Assessment; Portfolios (Background Materials); *Principals; Professional Development

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the principal evaluation portfolio process as it had an impact on leadership effectiveness, student achievement, professional development of teachers, and the reflective practice of the principal. The school district chosen for the study was a rural consolidated pre-K-12 district in New York that used the principal portfolio as an evaluation tool. Data were collected through structured interview questions answered by the superintendent and 2 assistant superintendents, interviews with 5 principals, focus groups that involved 10 teachers, and responses to the Reflective Performance Scale (Brown and Irby, 2000) by all participants. Test scores from the school district were used as measures of student achievement. Findings indicate that the portfolio process facilitates leadership effectiveness, and that it enhances student achievement. Teacher professional development was believed to be more focused as a result of the portfolio process, and the portfolio process was also perceived to enhance the reflective practice of the principal by facilitating collaboration and communication. The findings highlight the need for principal evaluation to be both formative and summative. The study also suggests that the evaluation process should enable the principal to set and focus on goals that are aligned with the vision of the school district and campus. (Contains 2 tables and 12 references.) (SLD)

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A Case Study on the Use of Portfolios in Principal Evaluation

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A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, April 22, 2003

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A Case Study on the Use of Portfolios in Principal Evaluation

Schools ensure that their goals are achieved through a variety of mechanisms, including rewards, sanctions, supervision and evaluation. As principals move into positions of authority, they tend to be subject to more performance evaluation and less direct supervision. Principals are typically located in the middle of the school district hierarchy and are supervised and evaluated (Bowman & Valentine, 1988).

The magnitude of the challenges presented by the social and cultural environment in which school leaders must function requires that administrative performance appraisal be given a far higher priority in the future (Langlois & McAdams, 1992). The principal manages a complex organization that must have direction, operate efficiently, instill confidence among employees and patrons and promote the personal growth of all personnel (Langlois & McAdams, 1992). To fulfill this constantly expanding role, the principal must consistently obtain appropriate feedback from the supervisor (Brown & Irby, 2001). In short, the best evaluation systems not only measure competence, but also train the principal to be more competent and reflective.

Principal evaluation should reflect the proficiencies necessary to measure the competence of the principal. Evaluation processes for principals should be based on best practice and research that supports successful schools (Langlois & McAdams, 1992). Some districts may use a standard checklist to evaluate principals, while others may use more authentic methods of evaluation. The development and implementation of an evaluation document should, however, reflect those proficiencies expected of the principal. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (1999) developed six

proficiencies for school leaders that could be used with the development and implementation of an evaluation document:

1. Promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. Promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing as well as sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
3. Promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.
4. Promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. Promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. Promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context. (p.1)

The goal in evaluation is to develop a program that is both valid and reliable and that helps the principal to reflect on performance. Valid and reliable evaluation should include dialogue between the supervisor and the principal (Langlois & McAdams, 1992). Communication between the supervisor and the principal should occur frequently and

should be held in the form of formative coaching sessions rather than as a summative evaluation (Langlois & McAdams, 1992). Brown and Irby (2000) suggested that self-assessment and reflection are two components that promote the growth of administrators. In the development of an evaluation process, there should be goal setting and a constant revisiting of those goals (Brown & Irby, 2000). The supervisor and the principal should work collaboratively within the context of assessment and evaluation of the principal.

Statement of the Problem

Evaluation techniques of principals have not changed much during the last decade; conventional procedures are still widely used and evaluations are expressed in the form of checklists, scales and descriptive assessments. Despite recent advances in the quality of teacher evaluation, performance evaluation for principals remains poorly thought out and largely ineffective (Guaglianone, 1996).

There are very few pieces of literature that link the principal portfolio as an evaluation process to leadership effectiveness, student achievement, teacher professional development or reflective practice. Evaluation of the school principal should be systemic in nature and should encourage professional growth, self-assessment and reflection (Brown & Irby, 2000).

The multi-dimensional job of the school administrator is difficult to assess. Lezotte (1997) stated the following as the new generation of effective school correlates: "(a) safe and orderly environment, (b) climate of high expectations, (c) instructional leadership, (d) clear and focused mission, (e) student time on task, (f) frequent monitoring of student success, (g) home relations" (p. 71).

These varied responsibilities of instructional leadership are not easy to evaluate using a standard checklist (Brown & Irby, 2000). In addition, leadership is situational, which makes it very difficult to assess each leader with the same set of goals (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The principal and evaluator, on an individual basis, should develop performance objectives and goals. The development of a portfolio as an evaluation process promotes administrator growth, which leads to improved performance and, ultimately, to improved schools and learning (Brown & Irby, 2000).

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the principal evaluation portfolio process as it impacted: leadership effectiveness, student achievement, professional development of teachers and the reflective practice of the principal. This analysis was accomplished by examining a school district that utilized the principal portfolio as an evaluation process.

There was currently no study available that analyzed these factors in relation to the principal portfolio as an evaluation process. Literature in this area could be helpful to educational leaders who are trying to determine the most effective method of evaluating principals. The principal portfolio provided an organized method of evaluation that was based on the theories represented in reflective practice.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

1. How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted leadership effectiveness?

2. How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted student achievement?

3. How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted teacher professional development?

4. How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted reflective practice?

Method

Sample and context. A purposeful sample was used to choose one school district that was using the principal portfolio process as a means for evaluating the principals in that school district. Gall et al., (1996) noted that the purpose for selecting cases for a study is to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. In purposeful sampling, the goal is to select cases that are likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the purposes of the study (Gall et al., 1996). The intent was to achieve an in-depth understanding of these selected individuals, not to select a sample that would accurately represent a defined population (Gall et al., 1996). In addition, purposeful sampling served to engage in presenting the widest possible range of data for inclusion into the thick description of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The school district chosen for this case study was a rural consolidated pre-k-12 district in New York located within 60 miles of a major city. This district was made up of three separate villages or communities that span 100 square miles. The demographics in this district encompassed 2,445 students with 97.3% White, 0.7% African American, 0.3% Hispanic and 1.6% American Indian. Economically disadvantaged students as indicated by free or reduced lunch comprised 31% of the enrollment. There were 180 teachers, 28 non-teaching professional staff and 33 paraprofessional staff members. The district was held accountable to two criterion-referenced state tests called the New York

State Assessment and the Regents Exam. Adults participating in this study met certain criteria: (a) superintendent, assistant superintendents and principals participating were in this district long enough to have been evaluated by a previous evaluation instrument, (b) superintendent, assistant superintendents and principals participating were currently involved in using the principal portfolio as an evaluation tool, and (c) teachers participating in this study were currently teaching in the district and had been teaching in the district prior to the implementation of the principal portfolio as an evaluation process. Participating in this study were: one superintendent, two assistant superintendents, five principals, and ten teachers.

Instrumentation. In this qualitative study, the instruments used were (a) structured interview questions for one superintendent and two assistant superintendents, (b) interview questions for five principals, (c) two focus groups for a total of ten teachers and (d) The Reflective Performance Scale (Brown & Irby, 2000), consisting of 16 items for principal self-assessment as related to their reflective activities. We used the results of the Scale qualitatively to triangulate the responses to four open-ended questions related to the priority and the impact of their own reflection. The Scale responses were also used to cross validate responses from the superintendent, assistant superintendents and principals on an interview protocol consisting of four questions which included information about: (a) leadership effectiveness, (b) student achievement, (c) teacher professional development, and (d) reflective practice.

Data collection and analysis. Focus groups were used with teachers so that they could respond to open-ended, structured questions concerning: (a) leadership effectiveness of the principal, (b) student achievement on their respective campuses, (c) quality and

relevance of teacher professional development and (d) reflective practice on decisions made by the principal. Questions were asked, yet, we allowed the participants to take major responsibility for stating their feelings and beliefs.

Test scores from the school district were used as descriptive statistics to specifically compare student achievement for the 1998-2002 school years. The test scores from the 1998-1999 school year were considered as baseline data because that year was the pilot year for the implementation of the principal portfolio as an evaluation process. Those 1998-1999 test scores were compared to 2001-2002 school year test scores. Data were analyzed from the Regents Exam and the New York State Assessment. The New York State Assessment is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades four and eight, and the Regents Exam is given to students in grades nine through twelve. The English language arts test is given starting in the eleventh grade and given through the twelfth grade for students who do not pass. Test scores in English language arts and mathematics were used as descriptive statistics to compare the four school years.

Document analysis was conducted; specifically the quality of the reflections over time in the principal's portfolios was analyzed. The reflections were correlated with the five steps in The Reflection Cycle (Brown & Irby, 2000) for thoroughness and quality: (a) selecting, (b) describing, (c) analyzing, (d) appraising the artifacts and (e) transforming leadership behaviors and actions.

Phase I and II. Interviews for the superintendents and principals as well as the teacher focus group session were transcribed and then checked for accuracy by another researcher, who listened to the tapes and checked the transcription simultaneously. Transcripts were reread for accuracy. In addition, responses to open-ended questions

from The Reflective Performance Scale (Brown & Irby, 2000) were read and reread several times for complete and thorough understanding of the responses.

Coding of responses allowed us to focus on conditions, interactions among focus group members, and consequences of certain actions stated (Strauss, 1987). A code was defined as a phrase that described the participants' perspective on the portfolio process, including but not limited to (a) leadership effectiveness, (b) student achievement, (c) teacher professional development, (d) development of a context for reflection, and (d) problem solving for professional growth.

We coded the transcripts. The codes that emerged were sorted into categories by the researchers. Then, the codes were circled and highlighted on the transcripts and notes were made in the margins. Also, codes were identified within the open-ended questionnaire that each principal completed. Codes were placed on index cards and sorted by the type of interview. These included teacher focus group codes and superintendent and principal interview codes. An additional researcher was used to also code the interviews to allow for triangulation of the coded data.

After all codes were sorted into categories, the transcripts from which each code was taken were identified. A code was considered to be worthy of further attention if it repeated itself in 50% of the interview transcripts or open-ended questionnaires. There were individual transcripts from the superintendent, assistant superintendents and the principals and focus group transcripts with teacher responses and interactions. There were open-ended questionnaires from each of the principals. Consistent with the principles of grounded theory, relevant codes were supported by text passages from the narratives and questionnaires to illustrate the themes that emerged from the interview and questionnaire

data (Strauss, 1987).

In order to decrease bias in the analysis of the data, the principle of trustworthiness was utilized to focus on the repeatability of observations. To establish trustworthiness, emerging themes were examined against the expert's views regarding leadership effectiveness, student achievement, teacher professional development and reflective practice as stated in the literature (Strauss, 1987). By allowing participants the opportunity to read and respond to their own transcriptions, reliability was enhanced based on experiences and interpretations of the participants. Through the use of triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and crosschecking, information with participants and relevant literature was reviewed to make sure that sources were in agreement.

Phase III. Phase III included the analysis of the New York State Assessment and Regents Exam scores from the school district. Test scores from the 1998-2002 school years were analyzed to assess student achievement and growth in the areas of English language arts and mathematics. Test scores from this district were not compared to other districts.

Phase IV. Past evaluation documents for principals were analyzed to look for indicators of leadership effectiveness, student achievement, teacher professional development and reflective practice. In addition, we reviewed the principal portfolios over the course of time to look for professional growth in the reflection process. We compared the principal reflections to The Reflection Cycle to determine if all five the components of this particular cycle were evident (Brown & Irby, 2000). Information derived from the document analysis of past and present evaluation instruments, as well as principal reflections, were included in the coding process and reported within the

emerging themes.

Results

Seventeen themes emerged from the research on the portfolio process in principal evaluation. These themes, depicted in Table 1, indicated that the portfolio process impacted leadership effectiveness, student achievement, teacher professional development, and the reflective practice of the principal.

The portfolio process facilitated leadership effectiveness by promoting communication, a common vision, ongoing self- assessment, visibility, documentation of accomplishments and professional reading and book studies. Superintendents, principals and teachers agreed that the principal was a more effective leader in these aspects as a result of the portfolio process.

The portfolio process also enhanced student achievement by focusing efforts on state standards, strategic planning and the identification of teacher strengths to build capacity among staff members. The superintendents, principals and teachers indicated that the principal maintained a focus on student achievement with a proactive approach to planning as a result of the portfolio process.

Teacher professional development was more focused as a result of the portfolio process. In addition, principals facilitated teacher input and empowerment through shared decision-making as well as making a commitment to shared learning by teachers teaching teachers.

Finally, the portfolio process enhanced the reflective practice of the principal by facilitating collaboration and communication as well as building trust and allowing for a non-threatening environment between superintendent and principal. The principal was

also better able to redirect opportunities for growth as a leader and become a more effective problem solver through the use of reflective thinking through the principal portfolio process.

Implications for Principal Evaluation

Several implications for practice emerged from the data analysis as indicated in Table 2. First, evaluation should be a collaborative process between superintendent and principal that encourages communication and reflective thought. The principal portfolio process promotes both collaboration and reflective thought between superintendent and principal. Use of the portfolio process requires time to be built in for dialogue about evaluation. Through the sharing of artifacts and reflections, the principal is able to communicate to the superintendent, the accomplishment of goals as well as professional growth. This collaborative effort through the principal portfolio process also offers the benefit of the exchange of ideas. During this process, the superintendent may gain insight into a new way of performing a task that can be shared with other principals. Likewise, the principal can gain valuable, new and innovative ways to solve problems.

This process should be ongoing, both formative and summative in nature; while encouraging the principal to constantly assess the effectiveness and impact of leadership beliefs. With a standard evaluation system that includes only a checklist and a one-time summative conference, principals are not developing themselves through their practice or gaining necessary feedback from the superintendent. The portfolio process provides the principal with insights into strengths and challenges as a leader, and encourages professional growth and planning methods for improvement. Because the portfolio process is ongoing and requires formative and summative assessment, the principal will

self-assess on a regular basis. In addition, the principal and superintendent can discuss throughout the year, the progress of certain programs and initiatives. This can serve as a monitoring device for both principal and superintendent.

Evaluation processes should help the principal to reflect in order to change behaviors that lead to better practice and decision-making skills. This process should ultimately enhance the student achievement and teacher effectiveness at the campus level. The principal portfolio process supports reflection, which, in turn, assists the principal with improving their own performance and leadership practices to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Self-assessment becomes an integral part of the principal's day, therefore motivating the principal to seek out new understandings regarding situations that arise. Because the principal is constantly reflecting on situations and decision-making, student achievement improves. In addition, through the portfolio process, principals are modeling reflection and improved practice to the teachers. This, in turn, will result in teachers that also reflect upon best practice with students.

This study also suggests that the evaluation process should enable the principal to set and focus on goals that are aligned with the vision of the school district and campus. It is very difficult, even with a small school district such as the one in this study, to keep all principals and schools in line with the vision of the district. In fact, the superintendent and assistant superintendents in this district expressed that, prior to the implementation of the portfolio process, principals were all focused on different goals and the vision of the district was quite disjointed. The implementation of the portfolio process clearly helped the superintendent to maintain focus and a vision for student success. Because of the continuous feedback and communication, the superintendent was better able to focus his

principals by assisting them in goal setting and encouraging them to strive for continuous change efforts to achieve success with the students. The principal portfolio was a major catalyst for change.

The evaluation process should encourage continuation of positive performance and assist the principal in communicating expectations with the district level personnel as well as the classroom teachers. The principal portfolio encourages ongoing evaluation and assessment of what changes need to be made to promote improvements. The portfolio process also encourages the principal to explore alternatives to challenges and determine what improvements can be made to ensure success. The principal should seek to use a variety of data from students, teachers, parents and community to forecast needed changes. Through the collection and reflection of artifacts and samples, the principal is constantly looking at a variety of data and reflecting on best practice. Finally, through the portfolio process, the principal is constantly monitoring and adjusting personal actions and beliefs, as well as encouraging teachers to do the same by modeling the behavior.

The evaluation process for a principal should be personalized and individualized. The principal portfolio serves as an authentic method for principals to document their actions and accomplishments and allows for a way to showcase their campus. The superintendent can also gain very clear insight into the principal's leadership abilities and priorities for student and campus success. The portfolio helps to create ownership of the evaluation process that is frequently missing from the standard checklist method of evaluation. In addition, the portfolio process promotes open dialogue from principal to superintendent, principal to principal and from principal to teacher. Finally, use of the portfolio

evaluation process fosters a sense of trust between the principal and the superintendents; which creates a shared sense of leadership.

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Table 1. *Summary of the Portfolio Process in Principal Evaluation*

Research Question	Theme
How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted leadership effectiveness?	Communication and open dialogue provided for a common language for superintendents, principals and teachers. A common vision is shared within the district. On-going self assessment helped principals to grow professionally. This process helped to document actions at the campus level and gave principals a way to showcase the campus. Principals were more visible and took notice of individual teacher activities.
How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted student achievement?	The principal supported professional reading and book studies. Focused effort on standards from the state and assisted in identifying problems with instructional practices. Focused effort toward student achievement

	through strategic planning. Principals were able to identify strengths of teachers to build capacity among
Research Question	Theme
How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted teacher professional development?	Focused professional development through the identification of definite areas of need. Principals supported proactive planning of professional development. Principals facilitated teacher input and empowerment through shared decision-making. A commitment to shared learning by teachers teaching teachers.
How has the principal portfolio evaluation process impacted reflective practice?	Reflection facilitated collaboration and communication. Reflection supported trust building and allowed for a non-threatening environment. Reflection redirected opportunities for growth as a leader. Reflective practice helped principals to become better problem solvers.

Table 2. *Implications for Principal Evaluation*

- Evaluation should be a collaborative process between superintendent and principal.
- Evaluation should be ongoing, both formative and summative.
- Evaluation processes should help the principal to reflect and change behaviors to lead to better practice and decision-making skills.
- Evaluation processes should enable the principal to set and focus on goals to help carry through the vision of the school district.
- Evaluation processes should encourage continuation of positive performance and assist the principal in communicating expectations.
- Evaluation should be personalized and individualized.

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